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Quiet honor meant a lot for proud defender of CIA

SOME POLITICIANS have their friends throw lavish dinners for them so they can revel in prepared words of praise from the rostrum.

They hustle plaques and platitudes to inflate their egos. They collect awards like other people collect Green Stamps. They thrive on hypocrisy.

Morgan F. Murphy Jr., the South Side Chicago Democrat retiring from Congress this month after 10 years' service, doesn't go that route. He figures that any honors due him should result from hard work.

ADM. STANFIELD Turner, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, must feel the same way.

When he decided to recognize Murphy's post-Watergate efforts to restore integrity and public confidence in the nation's intelligence services, Turner didn't bury Murphy with words of praise.

He simply called Murphy over to the White House Executive Office Building and presented him with the CIA's unique award for outsiders — the CIA medallion, a massive bronze memento of appreciation for dedicated service to the nation.

In keeping with the agency's low profile, there were no ruffles or flourishes. The CIA didn't even issue a press release. It was a quiet ceremony.

NEVERTHELESS, MURPHY, the hulking ex-football player and Marine officer, was like a little kid when he proudly displayed the medallion back in Chicago, a day after the presentation last week.

Congress had adjourned. Murphy had stood for the last time on the floor of that historic House. So nostalgia possessed him as he reviewed his decision not to seek re-election after five terms because of ill health.

He reminisced about the traumatic days on the Pike Select Committee on Intelligence immediately after Watergate, when accusations of wrongdoing by the CIA and Federal Bureau of Investigation threatened to destroy America's intelligence capability.

He recalled the facts, the fabrications, and the insinuations that had combined to hold the intelligence community up to international ridicule.

HE SPOKE WITH distaste of the men in government who had recklessly jeopardized national security with contrived information leaks that hindered the search for truth.

And he spoke with equal distaste of the folly of other men who had ordered pointless acts that had violated the law, constitutional rights, and human decency to the embarrassment of the nation.

Out of that controversy had emerged an assessment of the defects and weaknesses in the country's domestic and foreign intelligence operations.

Bob
Wiedrich



From that panel, named after its chairman, former Rep. Otis Pike (D., N.Y.), also had emerged the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, whose job it was to sort out the rhetoric from the facts needed to correct the abuses.

MURPHY WAS chairman of that group's legislative subcommittee, helping write several pieces of law that strengthened America's ability to protect itself from foreign spies, terrorism, and subversion while preserving the safeguards of a democracy. It was no easy task, balancing one need against the other.

One dilemma was the difficulty of prosecuting accused violators of national security whose trials might disclose secrets not worth risking at a public trial. Some defendants threatened to use such material in their defense, even though it was not relevant to the issues, in an effort to escape trial.

So in order to meet the need to protect a defendant's rights, while still protecting national security, the Murphy subcommittee drew legislation creating a pretrial procedure whereby a federal judge determined in chambers what could be disclosed legally in open court.

TO MAKE CERTAIN that all rights were preserved, Murphy called on the knowledge of intelligence experts, constitutional lawyers, and the American Civil Liberties Union.

"We had to prove that the executive and legislative branches could work together to protect both national security and civil liberties," Murphy said.

That legislation and other amendments and bills established the legal safeguards that intelligence agents also needed to perform their vital tasks without fear of later prosecution.

For the first time in decades, intelligence operatives and administrators had clearly defined limits which all understood. And with those laws, their self-confidence was restored.

"I'm proud of that medallion," Murphy said. "I'm prouder still of the job the committee did."

Which proves you don't need a free meal to feel good.